

MANATEE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S 2018 ANNUAL REPORT



Introduction

When the County's fiscal year began October 1, 2017 many areas of our community were still picking up the pieces and attempting to restore some of the normal routine of life that was disrupted by Hurricane Irma. The Building and Development Services teams helped property owners assess their damages. Our Emergency Management, Neighborhood Services and Redevelopment and Economic Opportunity teams were busy helping homeowners and businesses apply for state and federal assistance. Utilities staff worked with local contractors for three months to haul away half a million cubic yards of storm debris.

Thankfully, Manatee County was spared the worst of Hurricane Irma's damage and destruction. However, that storm showed how resilient our community really is and how much a local government can provide to its residents when they need our help the most. We avoided direct threats from hurricanes in 2018, but we were challenged in other ways. A slow moving red tide bloom in August prompted an extraordinary response from our Parks and Property Management teams. During this hottest part of the year, those crews worked from sun up to sun down to keep our beaches and parks clear from red tide debris and to minimize the impacts from that harmful bloom.

Good morning, Commissioners and thank you for the opportunity to deliver the 2018 Annual Report to you today. Each year we use this report to give an overview of the exceptional accomplishments our County Government achieved over the past 365 days. It is also my opportunity to thank some of the 1,800 county government representatives who serve this community throughout the year, many times without recognition.

I'll begin this year's Annual Report by touching on some of the accomplishments of our Public Safety Department. In recent years under the leadership of Director **Bob Smith** our Public Safety Department of 290 employees has become a state leader on several fronts. Last January, the Florida Beach Patrol Chiefs Association awarded its most prestigious award, Beach Patrol of the Year to Manatee County Marine Rescue Division. The award recognizes the best agency in the industry for its elite public service to the community. That is an outstanding honor for Chief **Joe Westerman** and his crew of 16 lifeguards who keep our public beaches safe for the 2.8 million people a year who visit them.

But that special award was only the beginning for our Public Safety Department. In its second full year, our innovative service delivery, the Community Paramedicine division, worked with local patients to keep them out of the emergency room and helped to divert

more than \$1.4 million in healthcare costs through preventative care. Those efforts were recognized by the Florida Department of Health when it named our Community Paramedicine **Chief Jimmy Crutchfield** as the recipient of the 2018 EMS Injury Prevention Award.

Our Emergency Communications Division that answers thousands of 9-1-1 calls each year also made great headlines. An international accreditation agency awarded our Emergency Communication Center (ECC) with its annual public safety Communications Technology Leadership award. Over the past 12 months, under the leadership of **Chief Jake Saur**, our Emergency Communication Center accomplished so much:

- ECC became the second agency in Florida to roll out technology that allows outside alarm monitoring companies such as Brinks and Vector to send information directly to call takers in the 9-1-1 Call Center, saving up to three minutes from call processing time.
- The ECC and local fire districts launched Pulsepoint, a free mobile app that alerts citizens trained in hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) when someone in a nearby public place suffers sudden cardiac arrest. 9-1-1 operators can now send alerts through the app at the same time they dispatch first responders to the scene. The app also notifies users of the closest available automated external defibrillator (AED).
- Manatee County ECC also became one of two agencies in Florida and 13 in the world to earn a triple accreditation from an international nonprofit that sets standards for dispatch centers.
- Manatee County ECC gave callers even more options in January when we rolled out text-to-911. Now, the hearing impaired or those who are someplace they cannot talk can text us their emergencies to get help from our first responders.

Animal Services Chief **Sarah Brown** along with her staff and some of the most dedicated volunteers in the County helped achieve the Board's goal of a 90 percent save rate for healthy, adoptable animals over the past fiscal year. That's a significant accomplishment considering the record numbers of dogs and cats that passed through our Animal Services shelter during that period.

Without any major storms to threaten our area in 2018 our Emergency Management group managed to stay out of the news. But when Hurricane Michael devastated the Florida panhandle in October, Manatee County first responders were some of the first to step up to assist. Interim Emergency Management Chief **Steve Litschauer** led a group of nearly 70 paramedics, Public Safety, law enforcement and fire district representatives to Gulf County, only miles from where the devastating storm made landfall. During his brief time in the position Steve has been the model public servant, stepping into an important role without hesitation.

Last year we also made significant advancements with Sarasota County in the construction of a new regional public safety radio tower system that replaces obsolete equipment with new technology giving police, paramedics, firefighters and other first responders a far more reliable way to communicate during emergencies each day. Those upgrades would not have been possible without the tireless work of our Information Technology Department under the leadership of **Paul Alexander** and the expertise of **Willie Miranda**.

Public Safety Director Bob Smith has surrounded himself with a terrific leadership team that has accomplished great things in recent years. But their success is thanks in large part to you, our Commissioners, who frequently remind us that public safety is your top priority. This year's budget continued that commitment to creating a safer community by adding 12 new Sheriff's Office Deputies to patrol a fast-growing population. You also improved the security in areas our public uses most by approving funding for contracted security services in our most popular parks.

Because of YOUR commitment, public safety and law enforcement consume roughly one quarter of your annual budget year after year. Your vision for the community, your empowerment of our workforce and your investments in the Public Safety Department have enabled our Public Safety Team to become one of Florida's leaders in the area of emergency preparedness and response.

2018 budget & sales tax projects

2018 was the first year we began to see the benefits of our voter-approved infrastructure sales tax when the popular dog park at G.T. Bray Park was expanded and now extends to three shaded areas. Also of note during the past year, with the Board's investment, our Property Management group under the leadership of Director **Charlie Bishop** and Project Manager **Michael DiPinto** oversaw renovations to the Department of Health building to upgrade the Medical Examiner's Office. That project also includes space for a new EMS station in the heart of Bradenton for quick responses to many downtown emergencies.

Our Budget Office, with meticulous oversight by Financial Management Director **Jan Brewer** and Budget Manager **Sheila Ballesteros**, presented the Board with another sustainable budget last year. We were able to provide you with a budget that meets many needs of a growing community while also setting aside some revenue growth for one-time expenditures in expectation that voters would approve the additional homestead exemption on last fall's ballot. However, the amendment fell short of approval, meaning some additional funding will be available in the coming year's budget to address some of the many requests that come before you each year.

Jan and her team, working with Utilities Director **Mike Gore** and Utilities Fiscal team of **Heather Dildine** and **Michelle Balais** and with assistance from **Bill Clague** in the County Attorney's Office, the group earned stellar reviews from Moody's Investors Service last year. Moody's assigned a Aa1 rating to Manatee County Utility Revenue Improvement Bonds. We also maintained a Aa1 rating on the system's outstanding \$166 million in net parity debt. Also last year, Fitch Ratings assigned a AAA rating to the County public utility revenue bonds that will pay for capital projects. Fitch also upgraded \$166.4 million in public utility revenue bonds to AAA from AA+. These ratings are thanks to prudent direction by the Board and will enable the County to borrow at far better rates when issuing bonds for utility infrastructure.

As part of the Annual Report we acknowledge many people who help make our county government operate smoothly outside of the spotlight. So, when we talk about the County's annual budget, it's a good time to recognize our award-winning Procurement office which works in tandem with County staff and the business community to ensure public funds are spent appropriately when we must purchase goods or services. Procurement Official **Theresa Webb** has placed a renewed emphasis on customer service in recent years and last year the division received its fourth Achievement of Excellence in Procurement award from the National Procurement Institute.

Customer service improvements & Neighborhood Services accomplishments

Last year we continued to make strides in customer service by implementing new technology through the web. A collection of new online offerings are making our government more transparent and accessible than ever. Last February, the Building and Development Services Department rolled out its new Online Services tool that allows customers to apply for permits, licenses, planning and zoning from their home computer or even mobile device. For the first time ever, Building Department customers can track their project's progress from submittal to approval without even having to come into our offices.

Kudos to **John Barnott, Glenna Campana, Diana Morrissey, Jennifer Baird, Lacy Pritchard** and to IT's **Susan Kulbersh** for the smooth launch of the new system. Online improvements and the sheer volume of building permits coming into the Building Department have enabled the Board to lower many permitting fees for the fourth time in six years, this time by 30 percent. Improved efficiencies in the Department have led to a 52 percent reduction in most Department fees since 2012 thanks to the leadership and direction of **John Barnott**.

In June we launched a redesigned county website that makes finding government information far easier than ever before. The site is easy to use and you can easily find what you're looking for using a computer or mobile device. The new site was made possible through the hard work of **Rachael Taft, Matt Arriaga, Seth Scott, Sue Gulch, Paul Alexander** and many others.

Manatee Libraries continued its long run of excellence last year earning two more statewide honors. The Florida Library Association presented its Libraries Mean Business Award to our local team for providing excellent programs and resources for local businesses and job seekers. The Association also presented the Manatee Library System with its Library Innovation Award on for the 805 Literary and Arts Journal, Florida's first public library-generated community journal.

Topping off another amazing year for our Library System was the recent announcement of our 2018 Employee of the Year. Braden River Branch Supervisor **Cathy Laird** is the modest public servant who won that honor last year. In nearly 20 years with Manatee Libraries Cathy has proven herself a dedicated, responsible, patient and caring team member. She exemplifies the ACE philosophy daily!

Many of these accolades would not have been possible without the vision of the former Library Services Manager and now Neighborhood Services Director **Ava Ehde**. She has transformed Manatee County Libraries into the state's finest library system and she gives us great expectations for the Neighborhood Services Department in 2019 and beyond.

As the interim director in 2018, Ava's team of professionals continued to stand out in their fields and to accomplish great things. For example:

- Joshua Barnett received the Manatee County Chamber of Commerce Individual of Merit a Healthcare Champions Award last year in recognition of the significant strides he's brought in the realm of health care services to our community. Joshua also helped Manatee County obtain a \$500,000 grant for Opioid-focused Peer Coach services to curb opioid overdoses and improve positive treatment outcomes.
- Veteran Services Officer **Lee Washington** crafted a Board proclamation that designates Manatee County as a Purple Heart Community. Using donations from the Wounded Warriors Foundation Lee worked with Property Management's **Charlie Bishop** and **Tim Funk** last year to install 50 reserved parking spaces for Purple Heart recipients at county facilities. These spots are a very public reminder of our appreciation for those who sacrificed so much for our freedom. Veterans Services also opened two satellite offices in Ellenton and on Anna Maria Island last year.
- **Simone Peterson** was awarded a Knight Foundation grant for a community visioning project called Speak Up Manatee. Simone and her team also launched a Neighborhood Connections blog and developed two new Neighborhood Action Plans (Washington Gardens and Parrish).

Simone worked with **Ogden Clark**, **Debbie Deleon** and **John Osborne** in 2018 to collect a significant amount of public feedback as part of our Back to the Future conversation about the community's expectations for our community in the next decade and beyond. That team put in countless hours -- many of them in the evening -- to visit neighborhood groups and homeowner associations to ask our residents exactly what they want from Manatee County for the future.

Responding to red tide

We began the Annual Report by touching on the remarkable effort to clean our streets and neighborhoods of storm debris after Hurricane Irma. But 2018 will be remembered by many Floridians as the year a severe red tide bloom had significant impacts on our local beaches and, in turn, on one of our economy's biggest drivers, the tourism industry.

In August, the routine daily cleanup of public beaches by our Parks Department took a turn. Property Management crews, led by Parks and Grounds manager **Carmin Demilio** and Grounds supervisor **Liza Click** began working from sun up to sun down to clean our beaches and parks from the marine life washing ashore from the red tide.

Midway through the effort we expanded cleanup operations and, under the leadership of **Damon Moore**, a vendor began clearing hard hit residential waterways. Property Management maintenance crews worked with local HOA presidents to distribute dumpsters, nets and buckets where they were needed most.

Kaycee Ellis and other team members from the County Administrator's Office along with Human Resources, Public Safety and various other departments, answered red tide hotline calls seven days a week.

Information Outreach oversaw the public information campaign to keep our public well informed of red tide information and assistance. Information Outreach also worked closely with DEP and Financial Management to secure a state grant for \$500,000 to assist with cleanup costs.

Our Redevelopment and Economic Opportunity Department team of **Geri Lopez, Karen Stewart, Bruno Kapacinskas** and others went door-to-door speaking with Island-based business owners to hear their concerns and to inform them of federal government assistance available to suffering businesses. They worked with Neighborhood Services to host the Small Business Administration office at the Island Branch Library for local business owners to register their losses with the state.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau led a marketing effort to drive business to the coastal restaurants that were hit hardest by the economic downturn resulting from the recent red tide bloom off of the Gulf.

By the time October arrived, our employees had removed 316 tons of debris in a two-month period. The dedicated men and women of those cleanup teams worked in

extreme temperatures, and endured sights and smells none of us wants to encounter. They worked into the night and on weekends to do their part in keeping our beaches pristine. The red tide cleanup effort is a prime example of the perseverance and dedication our workforce shows in a year.

Local tourism numbers remained strong despite the impact red tide had on many of our residents and businesses. Visitation to our area continued to climb during the last fiscal year when visitors increased by 4 percent over the prior year. Those extra visitors helped generate more than 10 percent more tourism revenue taxes last year.

Our Convention and Visitors Bureau, under the strong leadership of **Elliott Falcione**, has diversified our area and we're no longer so reliant on strong visitation numbers to our Island communities. Last year Elliott, **Sean Walter** and our CVB team helped attract almost 100 major sporting events to Manatee County. Those events bring hundreds and sometimes thousands of family members and spectators to Manatee County, sometimes from locations across the world. Even more events are planned in the coming year.

Livable Manatee

We mentioned John Barnott's leadership in the Building Department. It was John working with **Lisa Barrett** and **Margaret Tussing** to serve up revisions that will modernize your land development code. Another facet of that movement was the Board's new Livable Manatee Incentive Program created by Redevelopment and Economic Opportunity Director **Geri Lopez** and Housing and Community Development Manager **Denise Thomas**.

Working to change longstanding codes and to combat rising home sale prices in our area has made Livable Manatee a notable achievement for this Board. It has not come easily. But it is working to create affordable homes for low and moderate income families who want to establish roots here. Incentives for 10 projects were approved last year and more are on the way.

Working with the Bradenton Area Economic Development Council, our own Economic Development Official **Karen Stewart** continued to do represent the County well to prospective business owners. Under Karen's leadership last year, the Board adopted \$234,000 in incentives to bring nearly 279 high wage jobs to our area. The 10 businesses that received those incentives are projected to invest \$24.6 million in capital improvements here in coming years. Since launching our Economic Development program nine years ago, Manatee County has provided \$12.6 million in local incentives to create or retain more than 5,800 quality local jobs through 2024.

Investing in Parks

Last February we managed to improve upon one of Manatee County's greatest assets, Robinson Preserve. The Mosaic Center for Nature, Exploration, Science and Technology -- The NEST for short -- opened last year as a beautiful new elevated tree house education center for environmental programs and educational courses for the public.

Last year we also completed the Robinson Preserve expansion with new canoe launches, mangrove islands, trails, ponds and restored wetlands. More is coming in 2019 when another 150 acres of abandoned farmland is transformed into a quality coastal habitat.

Robinson Preserve is the vision of our Parks and Natural Resources Director **Charlie Hunsicker** and the result of significant efforts from staff and volunteers. It's also an example of what amazing work can be accomplished when our government works with other governments and the private sector to preserve local lands for the future.

Robinson Preserve wasn't the only park improvement last year. **Alan Lai Hipp**, our Environmental Program manager, worked with **Tom Yarger** in Property Management in 2018 on a nine-month renovation of the popular North Coquina boat ramp. The improvements greatly expanded boating access and trailer parking. Similar upgrades are coming to the boat ramp at Palma Sola Causeway which became a County asset in January.

Local parks and preserves offer unique benefits to public health, the environment, the economy and local property values. This Board is uniquely positioned to leave an incredible legacy in the areas of parks and recreation as we implement the Parks Master Plan in 2019.

Moving east and Future Planning

Florida appears to be in the midst of another period of more frequent and intense storms, so it is comforting to have the Emergency Management team that we have when hurricanes approach. But Public Works also plays a key role during storm preparedness. Last year with Board funding Public Works purchased five new sandbagging machines that have already helped to distribute sandbags to the public much more efficiently and with less staff power than in the past. The new equipment was one of the first projects **Chad Butzow** oversaw as interim director following the retirement of our friend **Ron Schulhofer**.

Although we have strong leadership in Emergency Management and Public Works when hurricanes approach, we must become better positioned to handle the local flooding that often comes when we have intense rains for hours or days at a time. Our Public Works maintenance crews oversee more than 503 miles of stormwater pipes, 655 miles of roadside ditches, 181 miles of canals and much, much more. Adding more people to the mix will only go so far to address flooding in low-lying areas.

During the coming year we will continue to have public discussions on a potential stormwater fee to determine if and how it will help prevent local flooding. What is the appropriate amount to charge and who will pay a stormwater fee? Which flood control projects will provide the most benefit to the largest number of residents?

In the coming year the Board should also begin to have public conversations about how our local government will address the business relationship for water resources this government has with three of our Island cities. Sometime soon, this Board will need to have serious conversation about the whether and how to transition those cities to a master meter arrangement similar to the agreements we have with the cities of Bradenton, Palmetto and Longboat Key.

As we continue to grow as a community and strive to improve the services we provide the public, there are other strategic decisions to make in 2019 and beyond:

- The County's Animal Shelter in Palmetto is consistently at capacity and often overcrowded. The building's electrical capacity cannot be expanded economically. In 2019 we will continue working toward a public-private partnership to build a new, expanded animal shelter facility that will accommodate more animals while meeting high standards of an animal-loving community.

- In recent years we've hardened county buildings and public spaces, but you will need a more holistic approach to security at government facilities if it's to be done correctly and in a way that does not create an undue inconvenience for our tax paying customers. Our Public Safety Department has undertaken a study on how to improve building and employee security throughout the County.
- In the coming year you can also look forward to recommendations from a consultant delivering recommendations on how to jumpstart business in northern Manatee County east of Port Manatee. We might expect that study to call for costly new roads and utilities that will pave the way for investors to open shop. You'll have to ask what level of investment are you willing to make in order to attract businesses and to create new job opportunities in that area?
- Not far to the east of that area is fast-growing Parrish, where new homes have been built over the past five years as briskly as almost anywhere else in the County. We will do our best to keep pace with all of the growth by providing traffic improvements, but what role should a county government have in helping a new region like Parrish develop a sense of place or somewhere to see friends other than Publix or the Parrish Railroad Museum?
- As communities north of the Manatee River continue to grow, you'll have a greater need to connect Palmetto to Parrish. How will we fund the next east-west corridor in northern Manatee County? Where will the job centers in North Manatee be located? What travel alternatives can we offer drivers to avoid crossing the congested bridges over the Manatee River each day?

In September of last year the Board purchased nearly 75 acres north of the Premier Sports Campus. In a few years that property will become a government services center with park amenities, a library and buildings for government services. That purchase was a significant step that you made over the past year in our goal to bring government to the fast-growing areas of east Manatee County.

Progress on 44th Avenue advanced closer to Interstate 75 over the past year. We completed permitting for the section over the Braden River. Construction on that section should begin later this year. Design and permitting are currently underway for the final segment which will extend from 44th Avenue Plaza East to Lakewood Ranch Boulevard, crossing I-75. The entire roadway will connect Lakewood Ranch to west Bradenton by 2024.

Moving to the population center of the County will make government services more accessible, efficient and effective for our fastest growing areas. In 2019 we will work with a design consultant who will make space and service recommendations that will provide the best value for our tax paying customers. We will include the Board and the public before proceeding with plans for the East County Service Center and recreational facilities that will go on the site.

No less important is a growing need to plan for new facilities for staff and field operations in the new growing areas of the County. This will enable us to explore new possibilities to sell some properties or for older facilities to be repurposed.

Time is also quickly approaching to identify a new site for a county landfill that will be needed within the next 25 years. Identifying space and beginning to plan for a new landfill is not an easy process. It will require special permitting and space for buffering and landscaping around the property.

In appreciation

And now that we have reached the conclusion of the 2018 Annual Report, I will again note that it is impossible to list each and every accomplishment we made in the community over the past year. Nor can I adequately express my appreciation for the 1,800 employees who work day in and day out to make Manatee County Florida's finest local government.

I extend thanks to each of our department directors. They are the exceptional team of leaders who make all of these great things possible through their leadership, dedication and support of our ACE philosophy.

I'd also like to thank **John Osborne** and Deputy Administrators **Dan Schlandt** and **Cheri Coryea** who has again proven herself to a strong leader in this government and capable of added responsibility at each stop in her career here. Cheri, Dan and John make personal sacrifices by working many long hours to make this organization run so smoothly. They are the elite group whose daily work and dedication set a tremendous example for our employees to follow.

Finally, thank you Commissioners for your ongoing guidance and for the support of the amazing staff that serves this great community. This is a solid, cohesive Board and you stand primed to accomplish many more great things in 2019 and beyond!